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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR INL/LP

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TAGS: [DR](#) [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: NON-AVAILABILITY OF CBP INTERDICTION ASSETS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Blackhawk helicopters stationed in Puerto Rico that have been assisting the Dominican Republic Directorate for National Drug Control (DNCD) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the interdiction of suspected narcotics laden flights and boats have discontinued support for an indefinite period. The support provided by CBP was under OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE and was discontinued after recent hostile fire incidents directed by ground based narcotics traffickers against the CBP helicopters. This has caused a shut-down of interdiction end game efforts and drug laden aircraft are delivering loads at an increased rate. CBP cited safety concerns and the need to protect their crews, DEA Special Agents and DNCD Tactical Response Team members and has advised that they would be willing to re-deploy in support of OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE providing they be authorized to deploy with U.S. manned weapons mounted on the Blackhawk helicopters. By way of this cable, post is reporting the problems with interdiction efforts and requests guidance and assistance to resolve this issue. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Since August 2007, DEA Santo Domingo (SDCO) and CBP Air and Marine Branch have been providing support to the DNCD with OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE. OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE is a Dominican led operation targeting illicit aircraft from South America which are airdropping multi-ton quantities of narcotics in remote areas of the DR during nighttime hours. This operation's success has been attributed to the deployment of the CBP Blackhawk helicopter which is responsible for transporting the DR Tactical Response Team (TRT) to the airdrop location. (Note: The DR lacks the resources needed to effectively combat this threat (i.e. antiquated helicopters not capable of flying at night and over water, lack of night vision trained and qualified pilots, etc.) and are solely reliant on the support provided from CBP for end game operations).

¶3. (SBU) Once a suspect aircraft has been detected by the Joint Inter Agency Task Force-South (JIATFS) and confirmed to be heading for the DR, CBP deploys a CBP Blackhawk helicopter and a DEA Special Agent Advisor from Puerto Rico to San Isidro Air Force Base, DR to pick-up members of the DR TRT. CBP then transports the DEA Special Agent Advisor and TRT members to the suspected airdrop location for end game operations.

¶4. (SBU) In the past several weeks, the CBP Blackhawk, DEA Special Agent Advisor and TRT members have encountered an increase in resistance from drug traffickers recovering drugs from the airdrop. The level of violence has increased to include drug traffickers firing at the Blackhawk crew and group aboard, resulting in the DEA Special Agent Advisor and DR TRT members taking a defensive posture and returning fire with small arms fire. No U.S. or Dominican Officials on the

Blackhawk helicopter have been injured to date however; an alleged drug trafficker was recently shot and killed. The most recent shooting event occurred on October 9, 2008, when CBP encountered two (2) drug traffickers shooting at the CBP helicopter in an attempt to elude law enforcement detection/apprehension.

¶5. (SBU) Since this event, CBP has terminated all deployments to the DR in support of OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE. CBP has cited safety concerns and the need to protect their crews, DEA Special Agent Advisor, Host Nation Counterparts (TRT) and the helicopter that are being placed in harms way from drug traffickers shooting at the helicopter. CBP has advised that they would be willing to re-deploy to the DR in support of OPERATION BROKEN BRIDGE providing they be authorized to deploy with weapons mounted on the CBP Blackhawk helicopter. These weapons would be manned by CBP personnel and would be strictly utilized in self-defense when encountering drug traffickers shooting at the Blackhawk helicopter and crew, DEA Special Agent Advisor and Host Nation Counterparts (TRT).

¶6. (SBU) DEA Santo Domingo has been in contact with DR officials from the DNCD concerning this problem and the possibility of permitting armed CBP Blackhawk helicopters to operate in the DR. The DNCD has also been in contact with the DR Secretary of Armed Forces regarding the issue and are awaiting a response. Post's CBP Attache has been in contact with the CBP Deputy Director of Air and Marine and with the CBP Chief Counsel.

¶7. (SBU) Since the 9 October shooting incident and the discontinuance of Blackhawk support, there have been 14 flights tracked into the DR, a noticeable increase (approximately 30 to 40 percent) when compared to previous periods of the same length. It is estimated these flights carry an average of 400 kilograms of cocaine per trip, resulting in approximately 6 metric tons of illicit drugs delivered during this down time. Even though the DNCD has a fully functional 24/7 Operations Center, a dedicated and trained TRT of approximately 50 individuals that respond via CBP Blackhawk helicopters and SUVs provided to the DR under NAS programs, during Operation Broken Bridge missions they are defenseless without the support of the CBP Blackhawk. Based on the known fact the TRT will no longer have the support of the CBP Blackhawk, there is reason to believe the narcotics organizations will take advantage of the downtime as the DNCD now must rely solely on ground based interdiction which is very difficult when considering the poor conditions of roads and vastness of the remote drop zones.

¶8. (SBU) Much of the training and equipment (e.g. SUVs, body armour, etc.) for the DNCD TRT are provided through INL funded programs. This, coupled with the complexity of the above issues and the fact that the ability to interdict suspected drug laden aircraft as they deliver their loads is at a standstill, warrants reporting and post seeks assistance and guidance. Request DHS work with INL and WHA to review these facts and circumstances and provide advice and assistance to ensure all end game interdiction operations can resume and that these efforts are legal and in accordance with U.S. policies and laws.

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